



**United States Department of the Interior**  
**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Uncompahgre Field Office  
2465 S. Townsend Avenue  
Montrose, Colorado 81401

[www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov)



IN REPLY REFER TO:  
6711(CO-S05)

April 2, 2009

Dear Stakeholder:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), in cooperation with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), is proposing a hazardous fuels reduction project in and around the Billy Creek State Wildlife Area. This project, called the Chaffee Vegetation Treatment, is located east of Highway 550, and approximately three miles south of the town of Colona in Ouray County, CO. It is located at Township 47N, Range 8W, Sections 33 and 34 (see attachment 1, location map). The 2,180 acre project area consists of approximately 1430 acres of BLM lands and 750 acres of Colorado Division of Wildlife Land managed as the Billy Creek State Wildlife Area.

The purpose of this notification is two-fold: first, to ensure that local landowners and other interested stakeholders are aware of the proposal; and second, for the BLM to consider public comments regarding this proposed action before continuing with the planning process.

The Billy Creek State Wildlife Area and surrounding BLM lands are important winter range habitat for deer and elk, and also support a year-round resident deer herd. The project area includes a vegetation chaining treatment completed in 1966, which reduced the density of pinyon and juniper. Currently, these chained areas have been encroached with young pinyon and juniper trees. The encroachment of pinyon and juniper in this area has continued to decrease palatable forage for the deer and elk as well as increased the risk of catastrophic fire to this important habitat.

To address the concerns, the BLM is proposing a project, in conjunction with the CDOW, to utilize prescribed fire and mechanical vegetation treatment on approximately 615 acres of pinyon-juniper and mountain shrubs to restore a more productive component to the landscape (see attachment 2, project map). The treatments would occur on both BLM and CDOW properties. The prescribed burns and mechanical treatments would be followed up, where needed, with herbicide treatment using Plateau (imazapic), or other suitable herbicide, to reduce the germination of cheatgrass. This will be followed by seeding native grasses/forbs/shrubs shortly after application to improve plant success within the treatment area.

Prescribed fire would be implemented in one location – approximately 485 acres. This would create openings for grasses and forbs to regenerate to improve elk habitat and would rejuvenate portions of the mountain shrub community to improve deer habitat. No fireline construction is anticipated on this unit due to good natural barriers; however, small lengths of handline or ATV plow line could be constructed in strategic locations based on further field analysis.

The mechanical treatment would occur on approximately 130 acres within a 340 acre unit of the 1966 chaining. Methods and tools that could be used include: a Lawson Aerator, rollerchopper, rotary mower (e.g. hydro-ax or fecon head), chippers, brush-cutters or similar apparatus. The tool would depend on cost and availability. This vegetation treatment project would increase forage while benefiting wildlife in the area. In addition, the treatments would reduce the risk of fire ignitions, would lower wildfire intensity, and would lower the risk of sustained crown fire.

We are soliciting your comments on this proposal to help identify any issues or concerns so they may be considered in the environmental analysis and decision making process. We would appreciate any comments or questions regarding this project. Although comments are welcome anytime, please send them by May 4, 2009 so that we can incorporate them into our planning process as early as possible. Please be specific in describing your concerns, recommendations, or how the proposal may affect you. It would be especially helpful if you would make note of any areas of concern on the attached map and mail or fax it with your comments. This document, including the maps, is also available online at [http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM\\_Information/nepa/ufo.html](http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Information/nepa/ufo.html).

Please send your comments to: Kelly Homstad (Wildland Fire and Fuels Specialist), Bureau of Land Management, 2465 South Townsend Ave., Montrose, CO 81401. You can also contact Kelly at 970-240-5393 (office), 970-240-5368 (fax) or email comments to [khomstad@blm.gov](mailto:khomstad@blm.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barbara L. Sharrow".

(for) Barbara L. Sharrow  
Field Office Manager

Enclosures (Location Map and Proposed Project Area Map)